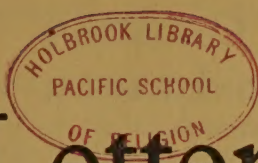


# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

The main subject of a recent News-Letter (C.N.-L. No. 77) was the importance of knowing the truth about Germany. If we win the war, everything will turn on our capacity to *understand* the Germany with which we shall have to deal. I have not read a more illuminating interpretation of the German situation than the one which forms our supplement this week. It is a masterly analysis of the main factors which have contributed to the making of Nazi Germany. It will repay the most careful reading, re-reading and study. The writer is an able historian with intimate, first-hand knowledge of Germany, who prefers to remain anonymous.

What is said at the end about the attitude of the younger generation deserves our special attention. I read a few years ago a book by one of the two brothers who are mentioned, Ernst Jünger. I found myself in an utterly alien world that both held and frightened me. I have not the book by me but the impression left on me was that of a mind exulting in the blind, impersonal forces which have caught man in their sweep, in the dominance and ruthlessness of the machine, in total mobilisation for the purposes of peace as well as of war. This was man's destiny which he must joyfully accept—to be the instrument, the agent of untrammelled and insatiable power, to delight in strength and strength alone.

Here is something significant and challenging that needs to be understood. But that is only the first step. We must go on to ask what is to be our response. It is a spiritual force with which we have to reckon; one that is rooted in a specific understanding of man's nature and destiny and in a deep emotional attitude to life. We cannot too earnestly ask ourselves what is the view of man which we oppose to these conceptions and whether it has a comparable power to stir the emotional depths of our being.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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## THE NAZI CREED

### ITS LINKS WITH PRUSSIA AND NIHILISM

The surprising victories and successes of the Nazis reveal one fact to everybody. There are considerable resources at their disposal; some dynamic quality is at work such as usually only religious creeds provide. These resources have to be carefully examined. The dynamic quality must be analysed in order to know the enemy and his strength as well as his weakness. The complexity of Nazi Germany makes it necessary to discriminate; sweeping statements will not do. There are various forces at work of different origin and different calibre; although these forces have pooled their strength and vigour for the time being, their roots still differ. A proper diagnosis must get down to the roots.

#### I

#### THE NAZI MOVEMENT

I shall first deal with the actual Nazi movement that sprang up in Munich some twenty years ago and managed to spread by way of propaganda all over Germany. I shall not deal with the history of this movement. Such interesting facts as the intrigue of Herr von Papen who smuggled Hitler into power are not my concern just now. The task I have set myself is to explain a mentality; the mentality of this pseudo religious mass movement.

The general character of the Nazi spirit is well-known by now all over the world. Let there be no illusion—this enemy, if he has his way, will show no mercy. He will make his defeated opponents drink the very dregs of humiliation. Some kind of organised rebellion against our common inheritance has managed to establish itself and is now towering over Europe, the foundations of which it sets out to destroy and to replace by

something new and repugnant. The first question we have to answer is: How could this thing grow? How could the Nazi creed take root in the hearts of men who were very much like the people one meets everywhere else?

#### THE BACKGROUND OF DESPAIR

The background of the new messianic movement was despair; despair in its subdued form of weary hopelessness. This mood gave the atmosphere of post-war Germany its deadly savour. There was nothing to hope for, so it seemed, everything was going downhill. The State was defeated and powerless. Those who had hoped for reconciliation and a new order for Europe were manœuvred by the course of events into the position of fools and dreamers who did not know the world, or worse, of cowards and traitors who were ready to bow to merciless enemies regardless of human and national dignity. The economic conditions were terrible—the middle classes practically starved out of existence by the money crisis, unemployment spreading irresistibly like a law of nature. A small clique of profiteers, many of them Jews, managed to settle down on the top platform of society, if such a thing still existed. Their irresponsible and conspicuous behaviour added the final touch to the gloomy picture of a despairing and degraded nation.

Here Hitler stepped in. When hope was a forgotten word, something to be sneered at, he reintroduced it into the lives of many as a living force. So precious a gift will never be forgotten by those who have received it. Certainly it would have been better for Germany and the world if someone else had given hope back to these weary masses but



there was no such person either inside or outside of Germany. Hitler restored their lives. That is no exaggeration, for without hope man's life dwindles away, all his strength goes. He gave his followers hope. He made them believe in Nazi victory and German resurrection and with the help of the faith which he had kindled, he fulfilled his promises. He claimed to be the Messiah of the German nation and he worked the "miracles," which seemed to prove that his claims were right. So much about the origin and background of the Nazi movement, its rise in times of despair and accepted defeat. I shall now examine the true nature of this new creed more closely.

### COUNTERFEIT RELIGION

Any religion worthy of the name demands and brings about some kind of transformation and change. If not, what is the use of having it at all? We might just as well do without it. Stagnant religions no longer capable of effecting such change may go on existing but they have ceased to function. The living water has receded. Who can tell whether the spring is still running somewhere; there seems to be no access. Yet the paraphernalia, the customs, the ceremonies remain. There seems hardly any change at all but the old words and terms sound hollow; dullness creeps in and takes the lustre away from things that once stirred and invigorated the hearts of men. At such times of religious decline and stagnation men are eagerly ready to accept some kind of counterfeit substitute for the religion of their fathers which has faded away out of their lives. The mark of the pseudo religion is that it effects no change and conversion such as the great religions of the world can claim. It lacks the wisdom and maturity necessary even to understand the nature of that task. But what the pseudo religion can supply is thrill and sensation and a turmoil of emotions. All this is achieved through abuse of human nature. Men are exposed to manipulations and tricks that make them stir. They cannot help it. The foul breath of propaganda gives them life (so-called) and the unconverted heart (soon unconvertible) has no power of

resistance against such influences. Tradition is gone.

### THE POWER OF SELF-DECEPTION

Let us now examine the manipulations and tricks which the Nazis used, and still use, to work people up. Their leading principle was to preach and practise self-deception and to reject promptly any share of responsibility for things that went wrong. "We (the speakers and those who listen with eager and responsive minds) are in no way to blame. We would have won the war (properly speaking we have actually won it), others are responsible for all our calamities." Thus all attention was focused on those who were labelled as culprits, the men who alone were to blame, the "November criminals," the Communists and above all the Jew, who was said to be behind all mischief. It matters little who the enemy was, but enemy there must be and an enemy who deserves no mercy. All the torrent of public hatred has to be directed against the chosen victims. Hence the evil passion for persecution, which is the mark of the Nazi movement. Admittedly persecution was, to start with, nothing but the splendid distant goal. The initial stage meant struggle and danger for the Nazis themselves, at least for the really active members of the Party, few in number. Self-deception and hatred are the two emotional forces which the Nazi missionaries nourish and cultivate. They need them both and if one of them should weaken it needs immediate attention. The Nazi creed cannot live without the soothing effect of praise, hence the amazing and shameless self-exaltation which permeates the Nazi community—the worship of one's own race, the vile adoration of the Fuehrer, the flattery of the young. The Nazi creed cannot live without hatred. It needs a scapegoat—an enemy utterly depraved and wicked, the devil incarnate.

One must not be unduly puzzled, as some critics are, by the intellectual side of this attitude—by this high degree of gullibility which seems to demand explanation. All these scapegoat myths are readily accepted because it is comforting to do so. To shift responsibility entirely on to other people's



shoulders is a great relief. Such self-deception, if it can only be maintained, is sweet indeed and its consequence, passionate hatred of the evil-doers, who cause so much suffering and distress, becomes a powerful motive and driving force. The problem is therefore not mainly intellectual. The more self-criticism is rejected and abandoned, the more human nature is ready to burst forth into indignation and to long for revenge. Any explanation which will give these emotions full justification will be eagerly accepted. It will not only be accepted, it will be desperately maintained and defended against all efforts that may be made to enlighten the mind. When people burned witches they clung to this superstition with particular fervour just because they were burning the witches. If they changed their mind about witches they also had to change their mind about themselves; the witches were innocent and their persecutors were guilty. Such changes are feared, and fear blocks the entry of enlightenment. Hence the so-called gullibility and the stubborn perseverance which is the mark of self-deception.

All this might have been nothing but a welter of disordered passions, an impotent frenzy leading nowhere. It was Hitler's personal gift that he was able to transmit hope. The creed he imposes has corrupted men, but even corrupt men can hope. As long as they hope they go on puffed up by praise and spurred on by hatred and indignation. If hope fails them their strength will soon give way. Neither self-deception nor hatred would stand the test of real disappointment. We can guess what the attitude then will be. There will be wailing and whining and an unpleasant display of self-pity. Such will be the after-effect of self-deception. This seems a comforting prospect but we shall see later that the Nazis have found allies of tougher fibre than themselves.

## TRADITION AND SUBURBIA

The question has often been asked: How could an old civilised nation yield and submit to such a movement? It seems much better to ask what forces could have withstood it.

What kind of resources could a man fall back upon in order to resist a stirring gospel of self-deception that gave him hope in times of general despair? The majority of men cannot live without hope. The Stoics have made a heroic effort to do so, they could see no other solution, but if we read one of the great Stoic documents, for example, Marcus Aurelius, the profound sadness, the frozen despair of such writings will teach us that this road is not open to many but only to very few. A nation cannot embrace Stoicism or something like it as a philosophy of life; a clique may.

And what about Christianity? It seems obvious that a Christian mind ought to be practically immune against the infection of self-deception and the inculcation of hatred. A Christian need not, and should not, rely upon Adolf Hitler to give him hope. A man who poses as a saviour and claims to have a mission; a man who can only thrive in the unhealthy atmosphere created by such aspirations—surely, he cannot attract anybody who has been brought up in contact with Christian traditions or who even *knows* what they are. There is the ancient treasure house of Christian wisdom where the experience of centuries has been stored. Some may say the treasure house seems to be temporarily closed, the public is not admitted and the clergy seem to have lost the key, but such bitter criticisms never apply to the whole of Christendom. There is a hidden life that escapes notice. Tradition is not just lingering on, it is still a force, sometimes a very unexpected one. Christianity can provide the antidote against pseudo religions. Where the ancient religion of our race still holds sway, fads cannot enter.

Is Germany therefore no longer a Christian nation? There has been a great readiness to accept this thesis and many people have thanked God from the bottom of their hearts that they are not like these "other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this publican," but the truth is Germany is not less Christian than any other European nation. The Hitler movement is suburban, and suburbia is everywhere practically out of touch with the traditions of Europe,



including the religious traditions. There were therefore no resources available that could have provided the power of resistance once the Nazi creed began to sway the despairing masses of Germany. This lack of defence was by no means something unique or particularly German. It was the outcome of a general situation that applies to other countries as well and would have produced very similar results elsewhere if the circumstances had happened to be the same.

If anybody should doubt the statement that the Nazi movement is suburban and therefore out of touch with any traditional element of our civilisation, let him read *Mein Kampf*. There you find the wild verbosity of a half-educated man, fed on newspapers and swayed by headlines. There is in the whole book not a glimpse of any conviction nourished by one of the sources of our tradition. It is all newspaper trash, passionately absorbed by an unguided mind. This formidable man belongs to nowhere in spite of all his boisterous nationalist talk. He has no roots, he is a citizen of suburbia.

## II

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRUSSIA

If this diagnosis is right, one might feel fairly confident about the future of the Nazis, for is it likely that a suburban movement which lacks permanent foundations should last? Unfortunately this is not the whole story; we have not yet covered the whole ground of the problem. This pseudo-religion of self-exaltation has found allies of more momentous calibre: the Prussian tradition and the philosophy of Nihilism. I cannot attempt here to give a full analysis of Prussianism but something has to be said about it, for the term has become a journalistic word of abuse and we must try to give it back some well-defined meaning which is based on historical facts.

Prussia is a mentality, not a nation. It is a certain frame of mind, an attitude of service imposed on soldiers and civil servants by two outstanding kings of the Hohenzollern dynasty who happened to be rulers of a minor German principality in the North East

corner of Germany, called the electorate of Brandenburg, since 1701 called the kingdom of Prussia. The real founder of Prussia was Frederic William I who ruled from 1713-1740. He did not entirely create Prussian efficiency, but he represented it in his own very queer personality for the first time in such a way that it caught people's imagination. Through him the King of Prussia became a historical reality—a new type of kingship in strange contrast to the pattern of monarchy worked out in France by Louis XIV and generally accepted and imitated by nearly all European rulers.

In Prussia a new emphasis was laid upon service and duty. There was lack of praise, maximum efforts were taken for granted. There was a pitiless contempt of self-indulgence and luxury, very often (but not necessarily) linked up with a boorish rejection of all the refinements of life. Obedience became the chief virtue, highly over-estimated in its value and importance. There has never been a Prussian rebel for the same reason that there has never been a Prussian citizen, for a good citizen is always a potential rebel. Prussians are subjects. It would be wrong to call this mentality barbaric, yet there is something strange about it, something primitive and undeveloped. Prussia has never been in full communion with the highest traditions of Europe.

This Prussian mentality worked for administrative and military efficiency. It was new and unique, not bad in itself, useful in many ways if kept in check. Nor was Prussia to start with hostile to the European tradition. Frederic William may be called a sincere Christian in his own strange way, and Protestant Christianity has always been an element of Prussian tradition, some kind of Army religion—respectable but very crude. The administration and the war machine which Frederic William set up might have been nothing but the extravagance of an eccentric King. That is what many contemporaries believed, but the thing was put to the test by his successor Frederic the Great, and it worked. The ultimate test was the Seven Years' War. This war gave Prussia its legend; the exciting story of Fredericus Rex,



the great Captain who managed to resist the whole of Europe, France, Austria and Russia. The fact that England's financial support kept Prussia going forms no part of the legend, but it is part of the historical truth.

The Prussian legend contains one important element which further development brought out, the element of emancipation; Prussia is capable of standing against Europe. One step further and the message runs like this : it is Prussia's mission to stand against Europe, Prussia is the counterpart of Europe. Once this stage has been reached there is real danger ahead ; European unity is defied and challenged, the common bonds are broken deliberately. I do not believe that this dangerous anti-European interpretation of the Prussian mission is an idea that originated from the Prussian mind ; it is too sophisticated, certainly in its mature form. It seems hard to believe that Prussian officers who still live in the Hindenburg tradition should like this queer philosophy of history, which they might even find hard to understand. But should it not be possible to make them eventually accept it ? It flatters their pride. Excessive pride is Prussian. However this may be, the idea originally came from outside, from quite a different source, it came from the philosophy of Nihilism.

Before dealing with this problem I should like to come back to my former point. Prussia has roots ; Prussia is a historical reality. In the nineteenth century Prussia conquered Germany but this victory was never complete. The suburban Hitler movement had originally nothing to do and nothing in common with Prussianism in its proper sense. Quite a lot of unemployed ex-service men joined the Party, they were mostly of the desperate type, men like Capt. Roehm who "discovered" Hitler and thought he had found a useful fellow who could make thundering speeches, but real Prussia was not represented. Prussia hates propaganda, said a German General, and Hindenburg called Hitler a drummer, yet in spite of this lack of sympathy it was Hitler's deliberate attempt to identify his movement with Prussian tradition. The Day of Potsdam, the great State ceremony in Spring 1933, was

perhaps mainly eyewash for the old Field Marshal, but it was also meant to be some kind of symbol, a message to the Army and to the nation. There were certainly many difficulties and hesitations that had to be overcome. The most urgent task for the Nazis was to bamboozle Hindenburg and to keep him uninformed.

To terrorise the defenceless, the methods of the concentration camps, the Gestapo—all this was not in keeping with Prussian style, however low your opinion of Prussia may be. But in the end Hitler succeeded. Prussia adores success. It despises and ridicules lost causes. Hitler and his rise to power must have fascinated the Prussian mind. God, so they believe, is always with the stronger battalions. The events of the war, the Napoleonic position which Hitler now holds clinched the matter. The "drummer" has been incorporated into the Prussian legend and the suburban creed of self-exaltation and persecution has been closely linked up with the Prussian tradition. For the time being the two are one. This alliance is very much to Hitler's advantage.

## PRUSSIA'S STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

Let us now estimate Prussia's strength and weakness at this present juncture. Everybody knows how formidable the Prussian war machine is. Their power of accurate planning is unique ; there will never be a muddle as long as things go well. Prussia's military skill is of the highest quality, her military morale is not. The ultimate test of military morale is defeat and Prussia has never stood this test well. In the moment of real crisis Prussian pride begins to melt ; there is panic and there is disloyalty. The events of 1806 and 1918 have made this clear. The great tradition of Potsdam seems to lack one element, which is the very soul of soldierly morale—chivalry. The element is there perhaps, but it is comparatively weak. Chivalry makes a man believe in lost causes. The Prussians never do. They falter. But as long as success is on their side they grow in vigour and resourcefulness.



### III

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIHILISM

We have now to deal with the philosophy of Nihilism, which, like Prussia, joined forces with the Nazi movement. There are many people who feel inclined to belittle or to ignore philosophical thought with regard to politics. They insist on being practical, but the strange and solid fact remains that the great changes in human affairs have been brought about by men who believed in ideas and who even went so far as to maintain that principles really are what their name indicates, things that come first. When Lazaire Carnot, the great commander of revolutionary France, defeated the disciplined armies of Europe in autumn 1793 he was reaping the harvest of Rousseau's philosophy. His ragged men and boy conscripts were the Crusaders of the revolution. Should the hour of mortal peril come over Nazi Germany, as we hope it will, the German masses might quickly lose their faith, the Nazi creed will give way and dissolve into sloppy disillusionment. But this will not necessarily be the end. A committee of Public Safety might emerge from the welter of Nazi disaster, trying to stem the tide. The leading men of this Committee would probably not be Nazis, they would be Nihilists. With them the real enemy will have entered the fierce conflict in which we are at present engaged.

The philosophy of Nihilism reached maturity roughly speaking at the end of the nineteenth century and is altogether a European affair, highly civilised though perverted. It is not limited to one country. This philosophy, which is more a philosophical temper than a doctrine, draws its inspirations from the symptoms of decline. The conviction grew, and was expressed from very different angles, that we are living in an ageing and tottering world. Some of these philosophers were purely analytical, pointing out the weak spots of our civilisation and deploring its decline, which was taken as something irresistible.

### FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

There were others who struck a more dynamic and imperative note. One of them

was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Chesterton has called him the Prussian philosopher. He was originally nothing of that kind. Prussia and what it stands for lies quite outside of the scope of Nietzsche's interest and philosophy, though modern German interpreters like Bäumler take pains to prove the contrary. Nietzsche despised the Bismarck Reich, the "blockhead nationalism" of the nineteenth century, anti-semitism, socialism and democracy. He despised practically everything around him, above all he despised Christianity, calling himself proudly the anti-Christ. Nietzsche delighted in the idea of a tottering European world; the abolition of its values. He believed with the fervour of a mystic that chaos and a general "melting away" would bring about the ascendancy of the superman, a class of superior beings who would govern the human race.

Listen to this outburst taken from *Thus spake Zarathustra*:

"Oh my brethren, am I then cruel? But I say: all that is tumbling ought to be pushed. Everything to-day is falling and tottering—who would like to support it? But I—I will give it a push! I am a forerunner only of better players, an example! Act accordingly!"

Nietzsche had a very high opinion of himself. He thought that his work was going to open the new era and that it was his task to reverse all European and particularly all Christian values. This strange, brilliant, but puerile philosophy was expressed in a most powerful style. An English critic wrote: "His thoughts affect us as if they were the burning tunes for which armies have perished and cities have been sacked." I think this is true. The cities are ablaze now and the armies are marching.

### THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Nietzsche's influence on the younger generation at the beginning of the twentieth century can hardly be exaggerated. He nourished the conviction that western civilisation was doomed and would have to give way, knocked to pieces by a ruthless and splendid race of moral supermen. After the great war a political periodical was founded in



Germany, called *Widerstand*. It advocated an alliance with Soviet Russia and a war of liberation against the powers of Versailles. The intellectual standard of this periodical was high. There was a wrong, but a clear and well expressed, philosophy of history behind it, the gist of which was : the Christian era has come to an end, Western civilization is doomed, Prussia, getting rid of Western influence and Christian fetters, will become the new world power, the great modern, scientific, imperialistic state.

The two most distinguished writers who contributed to this political magazine were two brothers, Ernst Jünger and Georg Friedrich Jünger. Both had been excellent soldiers in the last war, they were by no means representatives of the intelligentsia. One was a good poet, the other a philosopher of the dangerous Nietzsche brand that likes to play about with spiritual high explosives and dynamite. Ernst Jünger's mind moves about like a ghost or a demon in a city of destruction. This political group despised the Nazis. They despised the intellectual inferiority of the Party, the suburban trash of their so-called *Weltanschauung*, the cowardice of their persecution and their base methods of revenge. The periodical was suppressed and the editor imprisoned because of his pro-Russian policy, but I am sure that that was not the end of it. Rauschning, who has more inside information about the present state of affairs in Germany than I can claim, very much emphasises the influence of the *Widerstand* group in the German Army among the younger officers and also in the Nazi Party among its more intelligent members. He considers this influence to be the real menace. I agree.

Here you have the link between the Prussian tradition and the philosophy of Nihilism. This link makes Nietzsche a Prussian philosopher. Prussia now has the mission to overthrow Europe, which was founded by Charlemagne "the butcher of the Saxons," and which has now reached, together with Christianity, its final stage of staleness and decline. The task is great ; the reward is the world. The laws and omens of

history are on Prussia's side, for the Western world is tottering. This may all be madness ; I am sure it is, but there is method in it and method appeals. The official Nazi philosophy is so inferior and mediocre (just like *Mein Kampf*) that it cannot satisfy intelligent people. The philosophy of Nihilism can offer something. Its teaching is truly destructive. It is cruel ; human nature seems to have been abandoned on principle and demons are invoked. But there is quality and there is force.

## THE DEFENCE OF THE EUROPEAN TRADITION

Nazi Germany is to-day a very complex thing. Its origin is a suburban movement, exploiting human despair and abusing human nature and the passions of the unconverted mind. Persecution is its main character ; its core is a Messianic hope clinging to one man. This poor and repugnant creed, which nevertheless was able to stir and inflame the bewildered masses of modern Germany, has now at its disposal all the resources of Prussian tradition, its efficiency and organising power and its military skill. The explosive power of Nihilist philosophy gives a final interpretation and sanction to Nazi politics. A new imperialism, amoral, scientific, utterly ruthless, claims to be the destroyer and the heir of the civilisation which has been the home of European man throughout the centuries of our history. The road to destruction is open and a great nation, that can claim to have contributed much to our common inheritance, is rushing along this road, a menace to herself and to others. An analysis of the enemy's strength as it has just been attempted, might well bring home the plain truth : the task ahead is of the first magnitude. In this war England is certainly fighting for her very existence but she is also fighting for the cause of Europe. She would be still fighting for Europe even if the whole continent should accept the Nazi new order. Success does not affect principles. The hopes of Europe have descended upon this island and there they will stay inseparably bound up with the fate of England.